

National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Meeting
Las Vegas, NV

December 11, 2006

Board Members Present: Robin Lohnes, Renee Taylor, Larry Johnson, Gary Zakotnik, Dr. Vernon Dooley, Dr. Boyd Spratling, Dr. Wayne Burkhardt, and Richard Sewing. Board Member Absent: Melissa Scott. Washington Office Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Staff: Bud Cribley, Acting Deputy Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning; Don Glenn, Division Chief; Sally Spencer, Jenny Lesieutre, Dean Bolstad, Lili Thomas, Ramona DeLorme, and EK James. USDA, APHIS: Dr. Albert Kane. USDA, Forest Service: Ralph Giffen and Toni Strauss. BLM, Nevada State Office Staff: Joe Tague, Branch Chief; Susie Stokke, Wild Horse and Burro State Program Lead; and Doran Sanchez, External Affairs Chief.

Robin Lohnes opened the meeting at 8:00 a.m., December 11, 2006. She introduced the Advisory Board members to the public.

Bud Cribley, Acting Deputy Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning, introduced the BLM, the USFS, and the APHIS staff and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He said that the BLM Director continues to be committed to achieving the program goals of Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) on the range and that the Wild Horse and Burro Program will continue to be a top priority even as the budget gets tighter.

Robin congratulated Gary Zakotnik and Larry Johnson for being reappointed to the Board and Richard Sewing and Melissa Scott for being appointed to the Board in the position of Humane Advocacy and Public Interest, respectively.

Joe Tague, Branch Chief in Nevada, represented Ron Wenker, the Nevada State Director, and welcomed the Board and the public to Las Vegas.

Susie Stokke, Nevada Wild Horse and Burro State Program Lead, gave a detailed overview of the Nevada Wild Horse and Burro Program. Appropriate Management Level (AML) has been set for all but three of the 102 herd management areas and will achieve AML by February 2007. In FY2005, Nevada evaluated its adoption program and identified four cornerstones for the future: (1) re-focus on the Palomino Valley Facility as an adoption center; (2) continue to support the Warm Springs Correctional Training Program; (3) conduct trap-site or satellite adoptions around the State; and (4) utilize adoption contracts, training agreements, internet adoptions, and other tools to increase the number of successful adoptions. Nevada is also utilizing volunteers in various capacities and will continue to work with volunteers to accomplish wild horse and burro program work. Adoptions are up by 46% over last year.

Susie also gave an overview of the Las Vegas Wild Horse and Burro Program. The Las Vegas Field Office manages five Herd Management Areas (HMAs): the Nevada Wild Horse Range; Gold Butte; Red Rock; Wheeler Pass; and Johnnie. The Red Rock, Wheeler Pass and Johnnie HMAs are part of the Spring Mountains Complex which is proposed for gather this January and

includes fertility control. Susie reviewed the process for public involvement in the proposed gathers.

July Minutes

The Board approved the July 2006 minutes. The Board complimented the quality of the minutes.

Recommendations/Responses

Approval of Advisory Boards Appointments

Don Glenn reviewed the BLM's response to the Board's recommendation that the Department of the Interior timely approve applicants to the Board and inform the Board of proposed changes to the Charter. There was a general discussion about the impact of the approval process on the Board to continue to function. The BLM agreed to raise the issue again with the Department to see if the process can be improved. The Board will receive a copy of the new Charter.

Save the Mustangs Fund

The BLM met with Take Pride in America to discuss alternative options to utilize the Save the Mustangs Fund. Along with continuing to offer incentives to 501(c)(3) groups who assist the BLM in finding good long-term homes for the older animals, the Program will explore ways to partner with accredited educational institutions that offer Equine Programs. There is no formal timeline for the distribution of the Fund.

Identify HMAs to Adjust Sex Ratio in Gather Planning

The management alternatives of adjusting sex ratios and fertility control have been discussed with the Wild Horse and Burro State Program Leads and a policy directing consideration of the management alternatives is being developed. The Board requested an update when policy is developed.

Cease West Nile Virus Vaccination

The Wild Horse and Burro State Program Leads unanimously opposed the recommendation to cease vaccination for West Nile Virus citing the possibility of decreased adoption numbers due to public concerns and the misperceptions about the risks to human and animal health. A compromise was agreed upon where horses destined for long-term holding would no longer be vaccinated for rabies or West Nile Virus when it is operationally feasible, but those headed to the adoption pipeline would continue to receive these vaccines. There was a general discussion about this issue.

Pending Litigation

Don Glenn provided an update on lawsuits and Interior Board of Land Appeal (IBLA) cases.

1. The Fund for Animals lawsuit was decided in the BLM's favor.
2. A Nevada decision involving setting AML in the Red Rock Herd Management Area has been appealed and is pending in IBLA.
3. An appeal of the Nevada Dog Skin HMA AML decision is pending in IBLA.
4. An injunction against the use of PZP and removal of horses in the Pryor Mountain Range in Montana was filed in the U.S. District Court in Montana. The injunction was not granted.
5. A request for injunction for the West Douglas Herd Management Area (CO) gather was not granted.

USDA, Forest Service

Ralph Giffen stated that the Federal Government is still operating under a continuing resolution; however, the Forest Service plans to continue to transfer monies for Wild Horse and Burro work done on Forest Service Territories by the BLM. The Forest Service projects reaching AML in all Territories by 2010. The Forest Service regulations, manuals, and handbooks are being rewritten and they hope to have a draft for public review and input by the end of the fiscal year (September 30, 2007). Both the BLM and the Board would have an opportunity for review. The Board requested that common terminology be used. The agreement for maintaining the Forest Service's Wild Horse Position in Reno, NV, will end September 30, 2007. They would like to keep this position in Reno. Toni Strauss provided an update for the equine DNA profiling research project. The project is looking at Territories with a smaller number of horses. The Board requested a Forest Service summary of Territories and AML status at the next meeting.

Facility Report

Lili Thomas provided a facility report for the short- and long-term holding facilities. On November 26, 2006, there were 8,539 horses and 216 burros in short-term holding facilities that have a total capacity of 12,595 animals. Long-term holding facilities have a 19,700 head capacity and currently contain 19,457 animals. She also reported on the ages of animals in long-term and short-term holding.

Lili noted that one long-term holding contract for 1,500 head will be awarded this week. Another solicitation for a second 1,500 head long-term holding contract will go out in January 2007.

There was general discussion about the need to hold additional horses because of emergency fire gathers. There were 109 wild horses removed in Oregon and 483 removed in Nevada due to fires. Some of the horses were not gathered and were relocated to unburned areas inside of the

HMA's. Nevada animals are being held at the Fallon Facility in Nevada where holding costs are about \$2.90 a day. Fifty of the horses removed from the Rock Creek HMA are being held for a planned return to the range in a couple years. Larry Johnson reported that Nevada lost over one million acres to fires. He noted that sportsmen and wildlife groups have raised money to help with land restoration of areas affected by fire. He would like to see wild horse advocacy groups work with the BLM, wildlife and rancher groups on land restoration as other advocacy groups have done in their respective fields of interest.

Bud Cribley reported that the BLM did not receive the full amount of funding needed for range rehabilitation this year. Dr. Wayne Burkhardt noted that it is very difficult to rehabilitate certain areas because we don't know how to replace certain plant species. Discussion also focused on how fires affect the gather schedule. Lili Thomas reported that some gathers can be put off for a year without extreme detrimental effects because we are closer to AML. For animals removed due to wildfire, the fire program now pays a flat fee per animal removed that includes 120 days for holding. At the next meeting, the Board would like an update on wildfire impacts to range habitats, rehabilitation and impacts to wild horses and burros.

2006 Gather Schedule

Lili Thomas presented the completed 2006 Gather Schedule which included columns listing the number of animals left on the range and the high end of AML for each Herd Management Area. The information in these columns will be provided to the Board two times each year in July and October.

2007 Gather schedule

Lili Thomas reviewed the 2007 gather schedule. The gather schedule is a tentative schedule subject to change in response to unexpected events. Approximately 7,000 horses and burro are planned to be gathered in FY07. The gather season is July 1 to February 28.

FY06 Units of Accomplishment

Don Glenn reviewed the FY06 targets and unit accomplishments, and presented the tentative FY07 targets based on anticipated funding levels. He noted that holding costs continue to rise, and said that fire funding is not a part of funding targets for the program.

Adoption Program

Sally Spencer discussed the current adoption program. 5,172 animals were adopted in FY06. As of December 8, 2006, 790 animals have been adopted. This includes 683 horses, 102 burros and 5 mules. The BLM is trying special promotions to increase the number of horses adopted at facilities. In November, mares 4 years of age and older were offered for adoption in some of the facilities for \$25. The promotion was for mares that had recently been gathered and may have been pregnant. The promotion was a success because it brought interest to the facilities and helped to place 202 animals in good homes. Of that 202 animals adopted, 49 were the older mares. In December, the facilities will have a gelding and stud promotion.

Sally also reported on the Mustang Heritage Foundation activities. The Foundation continues to work on the Extreme Mustang Makeover that will be held in Texas in 2007. Fort Dodge and Western Horseman have signed sponsorship agreements for the event. The Foundation is working on volunteer development. There are over 1,000 new volunteers who signed up to support the Foundation. The Foundation will continue to work on fundraising. The Board asked that Sally provide the Foundation with the e-mail addresses of the new Board members.

Sales Authority

Sally Spencer presented an overview on Sale Authority. As of December 8, 2006, 2,279 animals have been sold (1,468 in FY05; 643 in FY06; and 168 so far in FY07). Only a few Equine Rescue Groups have been helpful in finding good homes for the sale eligible animals.

Save the Mustang /Take Pride in America

Jenny Lesieutre gave an update on Take Pride in America's Save the Mustang Fund. There have been 375 donations totaling \$208,140.98. There have been nine distributions totaling \$23,800 for 2,338 animals placed with 501(c)(3) Equine Rescue Groups. The Fund's existing balance is \$184,340.98.

One of the groups that continues to provide long-term care for the sale horses is the 3-Strikes Mustang Corral. They have purchased 101 mustangs, with 45 mustangs qualifying for the Save the Mustang Fund.

Research Update

Al Kane gave an update on the population estimation and fertility control wild horse and burro research projects. There was discussion about the research strategy's priorities and whether or not research for the habitat component should be considered in light of wildfire impacts in herd management areas. The Board requested a speaker at the next meeting to address how fires are affecting rangeland habitats and horse populations.

Futuring Team

Don Glenn read the mission of the Futuring Team. The BLM is looking at its needs over the next ten years, including maintaining AML. Don noted that on the range management will continue to be a high priority for the Program; however, that will not be looked at by the Futuring Team.

Bud Cribley spoke about the Bureau-wide Futuring initiative which will include hiring a project manager to coordinate the initiative; that includes moving a lot of the BLM's support services to the Denver Service Center; and having the States go back to a three tier management system.

Request of Board

Don Glenn asked the Board to help the Program determine what can be done to reduce holding costs. Robin Lohnes noted that the Board needed information first, such as the funding projections, avenues that have not been looked at, and legislative suggestions that could help.

Public comment began at 3:09 pm.

The Advisory Board reconvened at 4:00 pm with the Board's discussion of recommendations to BLM and information they would like the BLM and the Forest Service to provide at the next meeting. The Board requested a speaker come to the next meeting to provide information about the Coyote Canyon land and the relationship between BLM and the State Park. The Board decided they wanted to commend Chuck Reed, Wild Horse Specialist in Wyoming, for his long service and dedication to the wild horse program.

The Board set the following meeting dates for 2007:

February 26, 2007, in Washington, DC

July 16, 2007, in Nevada. The Board would like to attend a gather.

November 5, 2007, in Portland, OR

The next Advisory Board meeting will be on February 26, 2007 in Washington, DC.

The meeting adjourned at 5:20 pm.

National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Recommendations

Las Vegas, NV

December 11, 2006

1. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends the U.S. Forest Service maintain a position solely dedicated to Wild Horse and Burro issues in Reno, Nevada.
2. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends BLM review and update the current Wild Horse and Burro Strategic plan.